GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
PANCHAYATI RAJ
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:775
ANSWERED ON:22.10.2008
IT SUPPORT TO PANCHAYATS
Patle Shri Shishupal Natthu

Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether any resolution was adopted during the Seventh Round Table Conference of Ministers in-charge of Panchayati Raj for facilitating all panchayats with Information Technology (IT) support;

(b) if so, the details thereof alongwith the number of panchayats likely to be provided with such facilities; and

(c) the time by which all the panchayats in the country are likely to be covered under the scheme?

Answer

MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR)

(a): Yes, Sir. The Seventh Round Table of the State Ministers of Panchayati Raj held in Jaipur in December,2004 resolved that capacity of Panchayats for fulfilling their constitutionally and legislatively mandated role would be strengthened through Information Technology & Communication. The relevant extract from the Resolution of the Seventh Round Table Conference is annexed.

(b)&(c): In keeping with the resolution adopted at the Seventh Round Table Conference, a proposal for extending I.T. support to all the Panchayats in the country has been formulated and is under consideration of the Government.

Annexure referred to in Reply to USQ No.775

Relevant extract from the Resolution of the Seventh Round Table of Ministers in-charge of Panchayati Raj held at Jaipur on 17-19 December, 2004.

IT enabled e-Governance

1. It is recognized that IT (Information Technology and Communication) is a vital input of capacity for Panchayats so that they can perform their constitutionally and legislatively mandated functions better.

2. IT ought to be primarily positioned as:

(i) a decision making support system for Panchayats themselves;

(ii) a tool for transparency, disclosure of information to citizens; social audit;

(iii) a means for better and convergent delivery of services to citizens;

(iv) a means for improving internal management and efficiency of Panchayats;

(v) a means for Capacity building of representatives and officials of the Panchayats;

(vi) an e-Procurement medium.

In this endeavour, the Round Table specifically proposes the following initiatives:

Process Re-engineering:

3. All States shall undertake a time-bound exercise of process re-engineering in consonance with the activity mapping already being undertaken by them for the functions transferred to the Panchayats, with a view to moving the processes of decision making, implementation, disclosure to the public, delivery of services and reporting and dissemination of information to Panchayat representatives to an IT-enabled environment.

4. In this exercise regard shall be had to avoid duplication of hardware and software initiatives by different State government

departments and agencies.

5. Considering the functional domain of Panchayats that potentially extends to 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule, all e-Governance initiatives at the local level have to converge with the appropriate PRI as the nodal point.

Data Ownership:

6. Such re-engineered processes shall ensure that the ownership of the data collected at the Panchayat level is with that level in the first instance, as the system becomes sustainable when those who use the data feel that they own it.

7. While owning the data, the Panchayat could also operate, outsource or provide space to IT enabled multi service kiosk centers that provide IT enabled services to the people, including those that fall within the functions of the Panchayats.

8. The Community Service Centers being rolled out by the Ministry of Information Technology at the Centre may be located in the Panchayat offices so that Panchayats' services can also be delivered through these Common Services Centers (CSC).

Training:

9. There has to be a systematic approach on training of staff and Panchayati Raj members through a cascading mode on use of IT.

10. The opportunities offered by the satellite connectivity provided through the ISRO, including EDUSAT, can be used for undertaking training.

11. While developing training material, regard shall be had to design user friendly approaches that can facilitate training of the illiterate or the neo-literate.

Software:

12. Development of common software application packages with provision for appropriate customization by states is preferred. In this connection, the National Informatics Centre (NIC), which being a government body present in all districts of the country and which has already done considerable software development for Panchayats, may be considered as the primary software provider.

13. It is recommended that NIC strengthens themselves at all levels and provide dedicated staff through creating a Panchayat informatics division, with a time bound mandate to develop e-Governance solutions to all levels of Panchayats. This will include the strengthening of the District Informatics Office of the NIC to support the District Planning Committee and the Panchayats.

14. The National Panchayat Portal developed by the NIC for the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to become the information hub that links up Panchayats, the State Government and the Central Government for sharing of information, experiences and best practices. As a first step, all State governments may immediately link and port the content of their existing Panchayat Raj websites or portals to the National Panchayat Portal and all District, Intermediate and Village Panchayats can be enabled and facilitated to link up with the portal. The content can be regularly updated by the respective stake holders.

15. A repository of software solutions already developed by several states shall be maintained by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj or an institution nominated by it, so that they can be used by other states.

16. Software development shall be primarily undertaken in open source software, with Indian language interphase, so as to reduce cost of replication and licensing.

Hardware:

17. States should consider specifying a framework for common standards for hardware and put in place a system for transparent procurement through competitive bidding.

18. Funds for acquisition of hardware could be dovetailed from various sources and could include

(i) Infrastructure funds available in multilaterally funded projects,

(ii) Own incomes of Panchayats,

(iii) Funds recommended by the Finance Commission for the creation and maintenance of Databases,

(iv) Funds sourced from a fund to be created and managed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj,

(v) MP and MLA Local Area Development funds,

(vi) Purchases based on systems of annuity based purchases.

19. Considering the present power situation in the country, while procuring hardware, special attention shall be paid to providing reliable and uninterrupted power supply to computer systems. Special emphasis shall be placed on renewable energy devices and systems that consume less energy.

Infrastructure and connectivity:

20. It is recommended that the NIC expands its communication network, NICNET, to link all Panchayats at all levels by using State Wide Area Network funds provided by the Department of Information Technology, Government of India.

21. State governments can approach ISRO for providing satellite based connectivity in all the states to enable connectivity of all Panchayats. The initial infrastructure cost could be considered to be met or supported by an infrastructure fund that could be operated by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

Operationalisation of the plan:

22. The initiative of empowering Panchayats with IT capacity shall be treated on par with creating national infrastructure such as power, telecom and roads.

23. Formulate a mission mode/empowered committee mode for IT enabled automation of Panchayat institutions with NIC and other solution providers, keeping in view the national e-governance action plan of the Government of India.